



United States  
Department  
of Interior

Bureau of  
Land Management

August 2003

# Decision Record

## Weaver Mountain Fuels Treatment Project

AZ-020-2002-0094

Phoenix Field Office, Arizona BLM  
Yavapai County, Arizona



West view from Wild Horse Mesa, Photo by W. Boyett

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The Bureau of Land Management is responsible for the stewardship of our public lands. It is to manage, protect, and improve these lands in a manner to serve the needs of the American people for all times. Management is based on the principles of multiple use and sustained yield for our nation's resources within a framework of environmental responsibility and scientific technology. These resources include: recreation; rangelands; minerals; timber; watersheds; fish and wildlife; wilderness; air; and scenic, and cultural values.

## Decision

I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment for the Weaver Mountain Fuels Reduction Project, including the comments and responses, the process file, and the documentation of the public scoping, issues identification and alternative process. Based upon this review, I have decided to implement Alternative 2 – The Proposed Action to conduct management-ignited fire on approximately 14,000 acres of intermingled lands to reduce interior chaparral within the project area. The treatment areas will vary in size ranging from approximately 1,000 to 3,000 acres annually. Multiple treatments will be conducted over the next five to ten (5-10) years. The treatments in the various areas will mimic nature in creating a diverse mixed-aged stand of interior chaparral over the next ten to twenty (10-20) years.

This decision includes the following items: Interior chaparral vegetation will be ignited using hand held drip torches, terra torch (ignition device mounted to a vehicle), or a helitorch (firing mechanism attached to a helicopter). Existing roads, washes, and natural fuel breaks will be used to contain the fire within the project area. Black-lining may be used to improve the effectiveness of a control line in some areas. The burning activity, including black lining and broadcast burning, would be completed in three to five days.

The mitigation and monitoring efforts set forth in this decision are designed to assure that conditions meet the objective, which is to create a mosaic pattern of burned and unburned areas within the unit to reduce the threat of large wildfires and maximize benefits to wildlife and domestic livestock grazing. The following mitigation measures will be implemented as part of this decision, and will be applicable to all fuels treatments throughout the life of this project:

1. Fire will be excluded from all riparian areas within the project area. A =75-foot buffer of unburned vegetation (from the outer extent of riparian vegetation) will be maintained along all riparian zones to avoid impacting these areas.
2. No more than 15–20% of the steep slopes (>30%) will be burned within the project area to reduce sediment that may enter springs or streams.
3. To avoid impacting desert tortoises, fire will not be introduced into desertscrub vegetation and will be applied far enough away from transition areas (i.e., between interior chaparral and desertscrub) to minimize the likelihood of fire escaping into fire-intolerant desertscrub. Fire will also not be applied directly to small patches of interior chaparral surrounded by desertscrub or within 50 feet of large boulder piles.
4. Ignition patterns will facilitate a mosaic pattern of burned and unburned patches within the project area. No more than 50–60% of the treatable area will be burned.
5. Fuel breaks will be constructed around Arizona cypress stands prior to project implementation to minimize the potential for burning entire cypress stands.
6. Permitted livestock grazing activities in the area will be coordinated with the permittee/lessee to reduce potential conflicts between livestock grazing and seasonal timing of project implementation.
7. Low-level flights within the Hassayampa River Canyon Wilderness may be needed for ignition or for suppression activity. Prior to these flights line officer or delegated resource advisor approval will be necessary.
8. Motorized or mechanical vehicles and equipment will only be allowed within the wilderness boundary with Line Officer approval or that of the delegated resource advisor.
9. Authorized livestock grazing for the affected allotments within the burn unit will be coordinated with the grazing lessee/permittee. This coordination will include deferment of livestock grazing to allow for fine fuel accumulation prior to treatment and allow for plant recovery post-treatment.

10. To reduce the spread of noxious and invasive weeds during fire management operations the following elements will be required where applicable:
  - a) Equipment will be cleaned prior to leaving for proposed project site.
  - b) During incident management planning process determine the potential for spreading noxious/invasive weeds while traveling to and from an incident and during suppression activities.
  - c) Resource advisors will be aware of noxious/invasive weed problems at the fire and around fire camps.
  - d) All equipment will be cleaned before entering a fire camp to minimize the introduction of noxious/invasive weeds from other areas.
  - e) Material such as gravel, hay, etc needed for camp setup, etc will be certified weed free and/or source location inspected or researched for weed seed potential.
  - f) Resource advisors will make a determination if equipment to be demobilized from a fire needs to be cleaned at site prior to release.

The following monitoring measure will be implemented as part of the decision, and will be applicable to all fuels treatments throughout the life of this project:

1. Due to dense vegetation after the first phase of treatment, a BLM Archeologist will conduct a post-treatment survey to predict the nature and location of prehistoric or historical sites that may exist in this area of the Weaver Mountains. The phased nature of fuels treatment allows for additional surveys or inspections prior to specific treatments.
2. Pre and post-vegetation monitoring will be conducted annually (for up to 10 years) by fuels staff, using existing permanent photo points to monitor changes in plant cover, weed invasion, and additional disturbances.

## **Rationale for Decision**

I have decided to implement the previously described actions because they best serve as the basis for a long-term managed fuels reduction plan for the Weaver Mountain area that is in compliance with the Phoenix Resource Management Plan goals, and all other applicable laws, regulations and policies.

The desired future condition (DFC) is to have thirty to sixty percent less dense interior chaparral vegetation, which will improve wildlife and livestock habitat and reduce the potential for large wildfires in the project area. The DFC is to mimic a more natural fire regime, moving the project area towards Fire Condition Class 1, within five to ten years.

Management ignited fire and mechanical treatment will be implemented to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildland fire in the Weaver Mountain area and provide for public and firefighter safety. The specific objectives for this project area are to: 1) create a mosaic pattern of burned/treated vegetation; 2) reduce the threat of large wildland fires; and 3) maximize benefits to domestic livestock and wildlife.

## **Public Involvement**

At the PFO weekly staff briefing in November 2002, the proposed project description, the purpose and need statement and project map were available for review. The proposed project was discussed with those in attendance, BLM Specialists and Management Staff.

A BLM interdisciplinary team of natural resource specialist in fuels, archeology, wildlife, and rangeland management convened and completed their own internal scoping effort. The issues, concerns and opportunities that the specialists identified were used to develop the public involvement statement.

The public was invited to comment on the management proposal and to identify issues or concerns about the action. Public involvement letters were sent on December 10, 2002 to 530 interested members of the public inviting them to comment on the proposed action. The public involvement letter included a site-specific description of the area, the proposed action and a map of the project area. A total of six (6) individuals/groups

responded all six were in favor of the proposed action. Two (2) letters received from tribal entities identified concerns for the protection of prehistoric archaeological sites and cultural properties and expressed a desire that proper surveys were conducted prior to project implementation. Two (2) additional letters were received which identified concerns for the protection and maintenance of riparian habitat for Special Status Species and protection of possible sensitive plant species by Tribal governments. One (1) had concerns for the protection of the Desert Tortoise and riparian areas; along with ensuring that permitted livestock grazing is not permitted until regeneration has occurred. The last commenter was in full support to see the BLM doing fuels reduction projects.

The ID team reviewed these comments for issues that might require the development of an additional alternative and determined that there were no responses from the public involvement showed unresolved conflicts regarding the use of management ignited fire (see Glossary) in the Weaver Mountain area that would require the development of a new alternative.

Press releases describing the proposed project were published in the Arizona Republic Newspaper, on January 16, 2003.

## **Other Alternatives considered in Detail**

Under the Alternative 1- No Action, there would have been no management-ignited fuel treatment projects within the proposed project area. This alternative did not meet the purpose and need statement for the action, as well as not meeting the intent of the 2000 National Fire Plan. Current management, including full suppression of all wildfires, would have continued in the proposed project area. The risk of catastrophic wildfire is high, with unknown impacts to the resources in the project area.

## **Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study**

Alternative 3- Mechanical Treatment Only was identified but not analyzed in detail because it did not meet the purpose and need. Mechanical treatment would not have been applicable due to the topography/access or economically feasible throughout the proposed project area to reduce the amount of interior chaparral to achieve the desired condition.

## **Conformance With Land Use Plan**

The proposed action is consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and is the type of action assessed by the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), and authorized by the Record of Decision (ROD), for the Phoenix Resource Area Plan, 1988, as amended, see Chapter 2, page 17, sections Fire and Environmental Management.

The proposed action is also consistent with the actions evaluated in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for Vegetation Treatment on BLM Lands in Thirteen Western States, 1991, Environmental Consequences, Chapter 3, pages 14-22.

## **Appeal Process**

Any person that believes that this decision is adverse or believes that it is incorrect has the right to appeal to the Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, within thirty (30) days of receipt of this decision in accordance with the 43 CFR 4.400. To file an appeal correctly, follow the procedures outlined on Form 1842-1, Information on Taking Appeals to the Board of Land Appeals. The appellant has the burden of proof of showing that the decision is adverse or incorrect.

The detailed record of the environmental assessment process and process files are available for public review at the Kingman Field Office. For further information about this decision and the analysis process, which led up to it, contact Sherry Hirst, Zone NEPA Coordinator and Environmental Planner, 2475 Beverly Avenue, Kingman, AZ 86401, or telephone (928) 692-4435.

**Responsible Official:****/s/ TERESA A RAML****August 8, 2003**TERESA A. RAML  
Field Manager

Date

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